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ABSTRACT

A two-day exchange between staff of the University of Northern Iowa at Cedar Falls and the Burt Community School proved successful for all participants. The university team (professors, graduate students, and senior students who had completed student teaching) became responsible for the education of the Burt students while the Burt teachers and administrators met with other university professors for an intensive inservice program concerned with transactional analysis and other people-oriented teaching methods. Twenty-seven Burt families hosted 31 university participants who filled the places of 21 local teachers and 2 administrators. Among the anticipated benefits were the opportunity for Burt students to experience new teachers and teaching techniques, for Burt faculty to improve their human relations skills as teachers, for the Burt community to host a unique educational project, and for the university to put teaching theory into practice and experience first hand the strengths and weaknesses of a small, rural K-12 school. The anticipated benefits of the program were met and exceeded; a survey of Burt students showed 94.5% in favor of another exchange and narrative evaluations by staff were similarly positive. Other groups may want to consider adapting the concepts of the UNI-Burt exchange for use in their own situations. (JH)

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THE UNIVERSITY AND THE SMALL RURAL SCHOOL:

Partners in In-Service

by

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and
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Above the doorway leading into a science building on the campus of the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls is an inscription which reads; "Do not do what has already been done." The process of dissemination requires implanting an idea into the fertile field of a receptive mind which then analyzes the potential for the adaption or adoption of the concept to his own situation.

The UNI - BURT EXCHANGE concept is not unique in the annals of education. In February 1978, Dr. Ivan Muse of Brigham Young University delivered a speech at the People United for Rural Education convention held in Des Moines, in which he related a similar program for the purpose of orienting Brigham Young's student teachers to both the joys and frustrations experienced in teaching in small, rural schools with the expressed desire to provide successful teaching candidates willing to try teaching in rural settings.

Our purpose today is to share our experiences for your analysis and possible future utilization.

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The format of the UNI - BURT EXCHANGE was deceptively simple: for two days, the UNI team, consisting of college professors, graduate students, and senior students who had completed their student teaching, replaced the Burt teachers and administrators and became responsible for the education of the Burt youngsters. At the same time, the released Burt teachers and administrators met with other UNI professors for an intensive in-service program concerning transactional analysis and other people-oriented teaching methods. Classroom instruction of the Burt students was either the continuation of the regular educational sequences, mini-courses which stressed new and enriching topics, or a combination of both approaches.

Before the EXCHANGE concept is explored in detail, it is important to know the background of the participants.

"Where the heck is BURT, IOWA?" Burt is a small, rural community of 600 souls nestled in prime farm land in north central Iowa. Primarily of German ancestry, Burt residents have the reputation of being friendly and open. The town serves as a bedroom community for nearby Algona, and serves as a retirement home for a higher-than-usual number of senior citizens. Many families have three and four generation roots.

The community has justifiable pride in their youngsters and in the Burt Community School. While the family unit is not generally considered educationally oriented, the students are encouraged to continue their education beyond high school. Approximately 75% will attend some form of higher education and the students do very well in comparison with other students from other schools.

The Burt Community School is a K-6-6 system with 251 students, 23 teachers, and two administrators. The curriculum is a sound basic skills, college preparatory type of approach. The main discipline problem of the school is now noisy the students are in the hallways during the passing of classes. The students can be trusted to perform in an adult manner, given the responsibility to do so. This factor was critical to the success of the EXCHANGE concept.

The University of Northern Iowa is a state-supported university with an enrollment of approximately 10,000 students. Located in Cedar Falls, Iowa, 135 miles southeast of Burt, the university is the prime source of new teachers and principals in the state of Iowa. Originally a normal school, UNI has evolved over the past 100 plus years through a state teacher's college designation to its present liberal arts university status. The University of Northern Iowa is considered a leader in the field of teacher preparation, and their graduates

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are sought after and very successful upon entering the teaching field.

A third actor agency in the EXCHANGE drama is the Lakeland Area Education Agency 3, located 30 miles west of Burt. Lakeland AEA 3 is one of 15 intermediate educational agencies in the state of Iowa which furnish educational services, support, and regulatory functions of the state to the local educational agencies such as Burt. Lakeland AEA 3 has an in-service staff and has funds available for local schools to fund in-service activities on a per-pupil basis.

Now you have the knowledge and background of the actors and the outline of the play. Let's now look at the year of events leading up to the EXCHANGE, the formulation of goals, the problems encountered, and the communications required through the eyes of the university, the AEA, and the local school.

While the initiation of the EXCHANGE concept could come from any of the agencies involved, in the case of the UNI - BURT EXCHANGE emphasis came from the local school. The idea received from Dr. Muse wouldn't rest. Why not BURT, IOWA? If any school could successfully host such an exchange, Burt

should be able to. Burt has a small school; thus, the scope of the EXCHANGE would be manageable. The Burt students are well-behaved; thus, they could be trusted to perform as responsible hosts. The community is friendly and very supportive of their school; thus, there was little doubt individual families could be located to provide "bed and breakfast" for the UNI team members. The Burt staff, while not risk-takers and somewhat hesitant about change, are open-minded and fair educators; thus, the staff could be counted upon to be supportive. In short, the EXCHANGE would have a reasonably good chance of succeeding in Burt, Iowa.

Consider from the local school's point of view the multi-facet range of benefits which could be derived from such an educational undertaking;

Consider the Burt students; they would 1) experience hosting a unique educational project; 2) benefit from additional mini-course enrichment; 3) have an opportunity to meet university professors and experience different teaching techniques; and 4) experience revitalization through a break in the winter routine of school.

Consider the Burt faculty: they would 1) also experience hosting a unique educational project; 2) participate in an intensive in-service workshop designed to better their human relations skills as teachers; 3) have an opportunity to talk

to other instructors in their teaching fields; and 4) also would benefit from a break in the winter routine.

Consider the benefit in School-Community relations:

1) the community would be hosting university people in their homes and have an opportunity to meet them as people; 2) the community would experience the pride involved in hosting an educational first - something that has never been tried in Iowa; and 3) citizens would be afforded the opportunity to become directly involved in helping their school - a condition that happens all too seldom these days.

How about the University of Northern Iowa? What benefits would the EXCHANGE concept afford to entice a university to accept such an undertaking? The university would 1) have an opportunity to work directly with a small, rural school on a one-to-one basis; 2) afford student teachers and graduate students a field experience in their area of study; 3) have an opportunity to 'practice what they teach' - a direct field experience to test the methods they have been teaching to their student teachers; 4) an opportunity to 'come down from their ivory tower' and see a real K-12 small school in operation (some of the professor's classes are bigger than the entire K-12 Burt enrollment!); 5) to observe first hand the strengths, weaknesses, frustrations, and joys of teaching in a small, rural school; and 6) to become partners in a unique

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educational in-service project which held promise of future undertakings if proved beneficial and practical for the local school and the university.

Let us now take an abbreviated look at the communications required to translate the concept of the EXCHANGE into reality.

April 1978. The basic idea was presented to the Burt teaching faculty which gave their tentative approval.

May 1978. The Board of Education gave their approval to develop the EXCHANGE and authorized a tentative budget of \$1,000 to be paid by the school district, if necessary. This represented a substantial commitment because of the extremely tight budget on which Burt operates. The Burt staff then met and established the following parameters: 1) the EXCHANGE should be held between basketball season and spring sports, sometime in March 1979; 2) should be of three days duration, preferably T, W, Th; 3) the University of Northern Iowa should be approached to be the participating university; and 4) the in-service should cover human relations, preferably for credit.

July 1978. The Superintendent approached Nels Christensen, Lakeland AEA 3 Administrator, and Paul Stuart, Educational Services Division Chairman of Lakeland, for financial support of the EXCHANGE. These men tentatively agreed to support the EXCHANGE in-service on a pilot-project basis, thus solving the financial problem of logistic support.

August 1978. Dr. Dale Nitzschke, Dean of the College of Education, UNI, received the proposal of the EXCHANGE from Dr. Eastman, and gave his personal support to the concept.

September 1978. The Dean shared the Burt proposal with his Council of Department Heads and later appointed 18 members from eight departments to a UNI Rural Education Committee and asked that group to consider the Burt idea.

The students of Burt received their first, very brief, explanation about the EXCHANGE concept and how and why it might work. They were told things were very much in the talking stage at this time and might or might not materialize.

November 1978. Chairperson of the Rural Education Committee, Dr. William H. Dreier, was appointed coordinator of the EXCHANGE, to work with the Burt Community School, to determine if the UNI faculty was interested and then arrange a meeting at Burt. The EXCHANGE was identified as a project of the Dean's Office, College of Education.

On November 29, 1978, the first announcement about the BURT - AEA 3 - UNI EXCHANGE was sent to members of the College of Education faculty asking for volunteers for the K - 12 teaching and in-service course at Burt. Positive responses were received from the faculty and staffing then appeared possible.

December 1978. Dr. Dreier and Dr. Jim Sanders, In-service Education Coordinator for Lakeland AEA 3, met in Burt with Dr. Eastman to consider details and responsibilities of the EXCHANGE. The EXCHANGE was scheduled for three school days starting Monday evening, March 26, for staff orientation, and running through Thursday afternoon, March 29. UNI would supply teacher volunteers to take over the classes and furnish staff for the in-service instruction for the Burt teachers. AEA 3 would assist with the in-service instruction of the Burt teachers and assume the cost of transportation of the UNI team to Burt and the cost of extra meals provided by the school. Burt would arrange "bed and breakfast" for the volunteers, provide a school lunch banquet on Monday night and noon meals on the other days, and coordinate all EXCHANGE activities.

January 1979. The Burt students were briefed as to the scope, procedures, time-line, and advantages to be gained in the EXCHANGE. The projected itinerary for the days of the EXCHANGE was also shared. As an award for their participation and cooperation, the administration committed to sponsoring a ski trip to Mt. Kato for the Junior-Senior High School students during March.

The community received their first information about the EXCHANGE shortly after the students through the Burt Dispatch, an information letter sent by the Superintendent to all patrons

of the district. At that time, the need for host homes was discussed and volunteers sought.

William D. Hansen, Regional Consultant for the Department of Public Instruction communicated D.P.I.'s approval of the EXCHANGE and waived any problem of certification for the UNI team in teaching on the elementary and secondary level.

February 1979. February's activities were many and varied as final details of the EXCHANGE were consummated. A major problem developed in securing an adequate number of university volunteers. The format required faculty members to be away from their classes for three and one-half days - more than many instructors were willing to expend. A compromise reduced the EXCHANGE to two teaching days and two and one-half days away from the campus, and the staffing requirements were then met.

Another problem developed in the scope of AEA 3's participation in the in-service program. Since the Burt staff had requested credit for the workshop, the in-service had to be staffed by UNI personnel and meet the requirements of the UNI course description. Thus, much flexibility was lost in utilizing people other than UNI staff members. In retrospect, the hour of credit gained was not worth the loss in flexibility.

Three graduate assistants - volunteers from the Department of School Administration and Personnel Services - were assigned to perform duties as Superintendent, and Secondary and

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Elementary Principals. These people met with the Burt staff and coordinated collection of class and course information for the UNI volunteers.

March 1979. March was the month of final information and adjustments. UNI needed to make a staffing change on the day they came to Burt, and housing arrangements could not be finalized until that afternoon. Twenty-seven families were used as hosts which allowed one UNI guest to be housed with each host, for the most part. The places of two administrators and 21 of the Burt teachers were filled by 13 UNI faculty members, 6 graduate assistants, and 12 seniors.

The UNI team and the Burt faculty met informally the evening before the EXCHANGE to share information and to orient the UNI team to the physical aspects of the building, to their duties such as hall duty, lunch and playground duties, etc., for which they would be responsible.

The EXCHANGE became a reality and a memory with amazing smoothness and dispatch. All groups involved performed superbly. The feeling that surfaced in Burt after several days of reflection was that the EXCHANGE was an unqualified success for everyone involved. Among the junior-senior high students, 86.% recommended the EXCHANGE as a worthwhile educational experience for other Iowa schools, and when asked

if they would like to have another EXCHANGE at Burt, 94.5% wanted to do it again with 66.7% giving an unqualified response of "absolutely". An interesting side-light showed up in the analysis of the student's responses to their opinionnaire. Seven fifth-graders responded that they would not recommend the EXCHANGE to other schools, yet these same seven students "absolutely" wanted another exchange in Burt. Selfishness crept in; they wanted to keep it for themselves only! They liked being Number ONE!

A highly positive aspect of the EXCHANGE was the inter-relationships developed between the UNI team members and their Burt host families. In most cases, the instructors were treated as members of their host's family and experienced the strength and togetherness of the rural family circle. The hosts not only had an opportunity to directly become involved in helping their school in a unique educational project, but also indicated finding their guests to be interesting and enjoyable.

One expressed purpose of the EXCHANGE was to give the university people a chance to experience first-hand what it is like to work in a rural school system. It had a positive effect on Phyllis Pierce, who grew up in an environment completely opposite that of Burt. A black woman from New York

City, she found herself enjoying the all-white community of 600, the smallest town she had ever been in. *"I just love it. It's an altogether relaxing atmosphere,"* said Phyllis. *"The kids have been really nice to me."* While she will probably seek a teaching job back in New York, Phyllis said that after the Burt experience, she would now seriously consider working in a smaller school.

Another purpose was to afford an opportunity for the UNI teaching staff to test the methods they themselves are teaching to student teachers, and to become aware of the skills needed by a teacher in a rural setting. *"If you plan on teaching in a small community, you had better plan on being diversified",* indicated Dr. Judith Harrington, Assistant Professor in Speech Pathology. *"Colleges are giving instruction in the academic skill areas, but they need also to give instruction on the extra-curricular - how to coach cheerleaders, set up the junior prom, run concessions . . ."*

In final analysis, a great deal of learning was observed to be taking place during the two and one-half days of the EXCHANGE in a pleasant learning environment of mutual interest and respect. It would be difficult to say who learned more - those who taught or those who were being taught, the guests or the hosts, the teachers or the students - for while each group

was giving ideas, concepts, and attitudes so were they receiving in a similar manner. Yes, all the original benefits anticipated for each group were met or exceeded; however, the benefits derived in changes in attitudes and outlooks toward rural education, the humanizing of education, the personal experience of involvement, and the satisfaction of accomplishing a unique educational experience within the limited resources of a small, rural school may prove more valuable in the future. The EXCHANGE could not have been accomplished in a large school; it required the assets of a small, personal rural school. The UNI - BURT EXCHANGE would seem to verify the Gestalt theory: "The whole is greater than the sum of the parts."

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